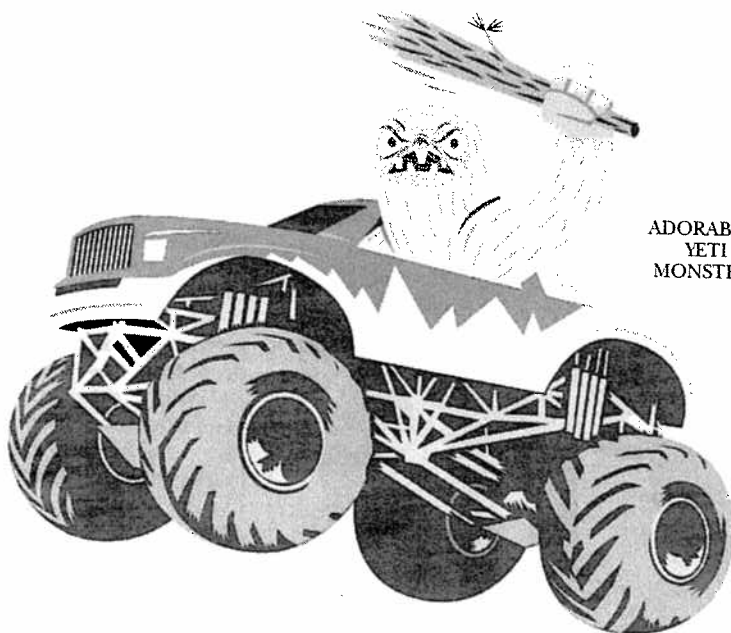


T E G O O , T H E B A D , A N D T H E U G L Y

Artist Tim Biskup helps Gama-Go's new Gama-Goo line target the toddler set -- By Mike Winder --

GAMA GO



ADORABLY PISSED:
YETI IN HIS
MONSTER TRUCK

BUNNY MITTENS, LADYBUG SOCKS, AND teddy bear hoodies. There's no denying it: Baby clothes are cute. But the travails of an afternoon at a Babies "R" Us – perilous parking, insufferably long lines, vertigo-inducing aisles of endless merchandise – is enough to make any parent want to revolt against anything even quasi adorable.

But what if you could have your cute and smash it too?

Gama-Goo, a recent arrival on the baby apparel scene, strikes a delicate balance between adorable and subversive imagery. Its onesies and T-shirts (\$24 each) feature characters like Yeti, a short-tempered abominable snowman; Deathbot, a sourpuss robot with an antenna skull for a head; and Tigerlily, a little girl who dons a tiger suit and a punk-rock attitude.

All these characters are popular crossovers from Gama-Goo's older sibling Gama-Go, the San Francisco-based apparel company that has been imprinting precious-yet-apocalyptic imagery by Southern California pop surrealist artist Tim Biskup since 2000. Biskup's designs can be found on Gama-Goo tees, jackets, purses, wallets, and other items, available at L.A. specialty stores like Giant Robot and Wacko, and via the company's website.

"The name Gama-Goo was something I thought looked good in Japanese," says the 39-year-old Biskup, explaining the company's origins. "I liked those three [katakana] characters, 'ga,' 'ma,' and 'go,' next to each other."

Biskup says the original concept for Gama-Goo was to take Japanese imagery – particularly the flat, angular elements of that country's vinyl toys – and combine it with elements of mid-century modern design.

He was first introduced to Japanese vinyl toys while working at Cartoon Network from 2000 to 2002. "I walked into [*Powerpuff Girls* creator] Craig McCracken's office one day, and he had these two *War of the Gargantuas* toys," says Biskup. "They were the ugliest things, and they were just great."

Thrilled by the beastly figures from Toho's 1966 giant-monster film, Biskup soon "spent a small fortune" collecting various vinyl toys from Japan – Gamera, Godzilla, Ultraman, and many others – which are spread throughout his Eugene Weston-designed house near Pasadena. He drew inspiration from their intriguing balance of ugliness and beauty.

"That's a typical Japanese thing," explains Biskup, "the balance of good and evil, light and dark, yin and yang. That's used constantly in Japanese cartoons. There's always this corrupted cuteness. It's the idea that anything *that* cute has to be evil. There has to be a dark side to it, otherwise it's not going to be interesting."

Perhaps no character better embodies corrupted cuteness than Tigerlily, who's based on Biskup's five-year-old daughter of the same name. Flip through the pages of *Limited Edition: Art and Design of Gama-Go* (Last Gasp, 2007) and you'll find designs of Tigerlily happily carrying boxes of guns and ammunition after a wild shopping spree in a gun store; dancing to N.W.A.'s "Fuck Tha Police" on an old-fashioned turntable; and sleeping peacefully in a field of flowers while dreaming about a revolver.

"I started drawing [my daughter] in that tiger suit when she first started walking around," says Biskup. Then one day he drew a picture of her holding a gun and e-mailed it to fellow Gama-Goo cofounders Greg Long and Chris Edmundson.

"They said, 'Oh, my God. It's great,'" Biskup says with a laugh. "I kind of forget how bad it is. But there's something so cute about it that you forgive whatever adult put that gun in her hands."

A gun-toting Tigerlily has not, however, made the leap to the company's baby line. The Tigerlily of Gama-Goo releases aggression in a much more acceptable fashion: rocking out via electric guitar.

"All the stuff we choose for the kids is lighthearted," says Long. "A lot of the work we're doing with Gama-Goo is trying to appeal to the customer. So we're thinking, what would a two-year-old like?"

But don't let your guard down just yet. Dangers may lurk below the surface of even the most innocuous designs. Take "Critter Ark," for example, in which an animal-laden tugboat chugs merrily along the water. Harmless? Consider Long's take on Bling Bling, the inoffensive panda bear clinging to the ship's mast.

"I have an odd relationship with Bling Bling," he says. "He doesn't have a mouth. He has this vacant, unblinking stare that I find disturbing. Out of all our characters, he's the one I'd be most afraid to be alone in a room with. I just don't know what the hell's going on with him. Bling Bling's character and purpose has yet to be determined." *

For products and info, see Gama-go.com.